

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Monday 24 November 2014

Time: 6.00 p.m.

Place: Shimkent Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors L Martin-Haugh (Chair), R Parker CC (Vice Chair)
L Bell, P Bibby, J Brown, M Gardner, L Harrington, S Mead and
P Stuart.

Start / End Time Start Time: 6.00 p.m.
 End Time: 7.55 p.m.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Broom, M Cherney-Craw, J Hollywell and C Latif.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES – OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 3 NOVEMBER 2014

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 3 November 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. DRAFT COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY

The Head of Business Strategy, Community and Customer Services presented the Draft Community Safety Strategy which was being put before the Committee in accordance with the provisions of the Budget and Policy Framework rules of the Council's Constitution.

The Committee was advised that there were two overarching aims of the strategy which were to build safer, stronger, more confident communities and to increase community safety, reducing the fear of crime.

The Committee was advised that the Executive had been of the view that there was a need to address the issue of the public's perception of anti-social behaviour (ASB) given a fall in reported crime and a Member commented that measures taken to discourage criminal activity or ASB, such as the provision of CCTV cameras, could actually increase the fear of crime in residents.

In reply to a question it was confirmed that the strategy was evidence based.

In response to a Member request for comparative data (Stevenage compared to the rest of the County and Stevenage ward by ward) the Head of Business Strategy, Community and Customer Services undertook to take the request to the Responsible Authorities Group for consideration.

It was **RESOLVED** that the draft strategy be noted.

4. PART 1 DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee had before it the agenda and reports from the meeting of the Executive held on 18 November together with the Notice of Decisions as published after the meeting.

This report had not been circulated to Members five clear days before the meeting nor had it been made available for public inspection. The Chair determined however that given the short period of time left before the end of the call-in period on 27 November 2014, it be considered on this occasion.

New Policy for the Management of Commercial Properties

The Committee was advised that a principal change to the policy was the addition of a clause to ensure fairness and transparency with the concessions allowed to Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) occupying Council properties. Central to the new regime would be the need for VCOs to pay the Compliance Service Charge and insurance costs for the property together with the market rent (less the Council's subsidy). The rent element of the total charge would rise in instalments from 0% to 100% over a five-yearly period.

In reply to a question it was confirmed that should a VCO renew its lease at the end of the five-year period the rent payable for the new lease would remain at the level paid at year five of the old lease unless there were extenuating circumstances to warrant a review. Members requested that this be written into the policy.

In response to a request the Corporate Property Manager undertook to provide a table detailing the levels of rent to be paid under the new policy compared with rents currently being paid.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan

The Strategic Director (Community) presented the HRA Business Plan.

The Committee was advised that the plan included the provision of 1900 new council houses, of which 500 would be provided within the next 10 years.

The Committee was further advised that the plan would be reviewed by the Executive on a yearly basis.

In reply to an issue raised the Strategic Director (Communities) highlighted recommendation 2.8 of the Executive report which stated that a plain English version of the plan would be prepared complete with summary details of the projected budget and cash flow.

A Member expressed concern that a property that had been refurbished to meet the Decent Homes Standard could be purchased under Right to Buy resulting in a financial loss to the Council. In reply the Committee was advised that there were mechanisms which set a minimum price level dependant on the amount the Council had spent on the property. The Council had also applied for similar protections for properties acquired since 2008.

The Committee was further advised that Right to Buy properties were independently valued and that the Council had a right to challenge the valuation. Once the valuation had been agreed the mechanisms to determine the minimum price level would be activated.

In reply to a question concerning Standard Assessment Procedure energy efficiency ratings for new properties the Committee was advised that a Council House Building Strategy would be presented to the Executive at its December meeting.

2nd Quarter Monitoring Report – General Fund and HRA

A Member suggested that as the proposed savings from car parking charges at the Showground had been deleted, the football club should be approached to provide stewards in the car parking area to ensure public safety. The Strategic Director (Resources) undertook to consider this suggestion and feedback to the Executive.

Capital Strategy Update

The Committee was advised that a revised draft strategy would be presented to the Executive at its January meeting.

In reply to a question concerning the highways issues with the Hertford Road Play Area the Assistant Director Finance undertook to investigate and provide an update to the Committee.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part I decisions of the Executive taken on 18 November 2014 be noted:

- Minutes – Overview and Scrutiny Committees
- New Policy for the Management of Commercial Properties
- Housing Revenue Account Business Plan
- 2nd Quarter Monitoring Report – General Fund and HRA
- Capital Strategy Update

5. URGENT PART 1 DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

6. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

7. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. Under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1-7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by SI2006 No.88.

2. Members having considered the reasons for the following report being in Part II and determined that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

8. PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

This report had not been circulated to Members five clear days before the meeting. The Chair determined however that given the short period of time left before the end of the call-in period on 27 November 2014, it be considered on this occasion.

Priority Based Budgeting

Members asked a number of detailed questions about the report which were answered by the Officer.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following Part II decision taken by the Executive at its meeting on 18 November 2014 be noted:

- Priority Based Budgeting

9. URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

10. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

Chair